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February 19, 2013

Senators Harp and Kane
Representatives Walker and Miner
Appropriations Committee
Room 2700, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senators and Representatives,

I write as a Commissioner on the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Connecticut representing lower Fairfield County, as an officer of PCSW, and as an elected member of the Board of Estimate and Taxation in Greenwich. I urge you to maintain the independence of this vitally important Commission for both policy and budgetary reasons.

For forty years, PCSW has given a crucial voice to the majority of our state's population -- a most unfortunate irony. Why has this advocacy proven vitally important here, across our country and across the globe? Because gender discrimination, human trafficking, sexual harassment, sexual violence, poverty and a variety of other critical social, economic and legal issues still challenge women and girls disproportionately. Substantial data compiled by PCSW support the fact that this injustice continues in Connecticut. Advocacy for the majority in this state is also critical because unlike our federal Congress and other state legislatures, there is no women's caucus in the Connecticut General Assembly advocating for women and girls. The General Assembly recognized the need for PCSW when it created PCSW forty years ago, and this need is more pressing than ever.

A consolidation of advocacy commissions is also a sub-optimal approach to tackling the policy issues represented by all these commissions. Our local BET periodically reviews this on a much smaller scale when we think strategically about department consolidations. Time and again, we reach the conclusion that in order for a department to advocate well for a specific population, the department needs substantial expertise and manpower dedicated over time to a specific subject area. The consolidation envisioned by the Governor's budget will result in a severe dilution of expertise and effectiveness by all commissions. I view this approach as an unfortunate abdication of the missions of all of these commissions. The General Assembly should reverse this consolidation and preserve the current approach to advocating for key populations in our state.

Finally, the eventual savings envisioned by the consolidation of these commissions are miniscule. The PCSW budget has already been cut by more than half in the past few cycles, and the current PCSW budget represents .0000265% of the State's total budget. Closing the State's budget gap will not be achieved or even aided in a material way by this irrational consolidation of commissions. I urge you to focus budget cutting on other areas of state government where efficiencies are more likely to be achieved without the abdication of important social policy goals.

I am grateful for your consideration of these issues, and I urge you to preserve the current autonomy and budget of the PCSW.

Sincerely,

Mary Lee A. Kiernan, Esq.
PCSW Commissioner